



THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

~~TOP SECRET~~

JCSM-195-68

30 March 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: US Policy for Laos (U)

1. (S) The Joint Chiefs of Staff have reviewed the situation in Laos on a continuing basis. Since 1962, the US Government has based its policy for Laos upon observance of the Geneva Agreements Respecting Laos (1962) which were signed by 14 nations, including the United States and North Vietnam. The Agreements were designed to guarantee the neutrality, independence, and territorial integrity of Laos and the sovereignty of the Royal Laotian Government.

2. (S) The Government of North Vietnam has manipulated the Agreements to suit its own interests. The North Vietnamese use the eastern Panhandle as a sanctuary and have developed a logistic and troop movement system from North to South Vietnam through that area. In addition, regular North Vietnamese Army units are being employed in offensive operations against the forces of the Royal Laotian Government.

3. (S) Generally, the US Government has adhered to a policy of respect for the Geneva Agreements and has undertaken military actions in Laos only in response to mounting North Vietnamese violations. These military actions have been generally of low intensity and have been conducted largely with the knowledge and consent of the Royal Laotian Government. Further, these military actions have been planned and executed carefully in order to preserve the fragile political balance of power in Laos, to avoid public exposure, and to minimize the likelihood of communist takeover of the entire country. The North Vietnam/Laos Panhandle logistic and troop movement structure has been expanded to the point where major North Vietnamese Army forces threaten operations in I, II, and III Corps Tactical Zones in South Vietnam. Due to the enemy Tet offensive, supported in large measure through the Panhandle, pacification in South Vietnam suffered a serious reverse. So long as North Vietnam controls eastern Laos, attainment of US objectives in Southeast Asia will be most difficult.

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4. (157) The Joint Chiefs of Staff propose that you take action to initiate formal interdepartmental reassessment of US policy for Laos. There is a need to identify methods whereby efforts to obtain international support to eliminate North Vietnamese exploitation of the Geneva Agreements can be broadened and intensified. Measures to be considered could include reconvening of the Geneva Signatories, direct action to strengthen or replace the International Control Commission, injection of a UN peacekeeping force, or other actions worthy of investigation.

5. (157) The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that a memorandum, substantially as contained in the Appendix hereto, be forwarded to the Secretary of State expressing concern over the gravity of the situation in Laos and proposing formal consideration of the problem by the Interdepartmental Regional Group/East Asia or other appropriate interdepartmental group.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

*Earle G. Wheeler*

EARLE G. WHEELER  
Chairman  
Joint Chiefs of Staff

Attachment

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APPENDIX

DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Subject: US Policy for Laos (U)

1. ~~SECRET~~ I know you share my concern over the deteriorating situa- 1  
tion in Laos. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have also indicated their 2  
concern. I note that representatives of the Departments of State 3  
and Defense have recently collaborated on a contingency study for 4  
Laos and Thailand. 5
2. ~~SECRET~~ I recommend that a broader effort to reassess US policy 6  
for Laos be undertaken on a formal basis by the Interdepartmental 7  
Regional Group/East Asia or other appropriate interdepartmental 8  
group. 9
3. ~~SECRET~~ The primary purposes of the reassessment would be to 10  
identify means to obtain international support to eliminate 11  
North Vietnamese exploitation of the Geneva Agreements and to 12  
weigh alternatives to better promote US interests. 13